

Bayous, Hurricanes, Disasters and Environmental Health in New Orleans

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National Library of Medicine Special Project

Louisiana's Environment & Hurricane Katrina

- Large concentration of refineries and power plants that contribute to the global warming effect of increasing the force of hurricanes
- Massive network of oil/gas pipelines wiped out coastal wetlands that absorb the impact of hurricanes
- Creation of an industrial canal that destroyed wetlands and served as a funnel for Hurricane Katrina storm surge
- Decades of toxic industrial discharges into waters that flooded coastal communities and 80% of New Orleans

THE NEED FOR REFORM

Unhealthy & Unsafe Communities With or Without Environmental Laws



Two boys on a seesaw in a playground in front of the Shell Chemical facility Norco, LA



Boy on a seesaw in a playground in front of a rayon facility in Durban, South Africa

Environmental System Failures Exacerbate Health Disparities



New Orleans building after the Hurricane.

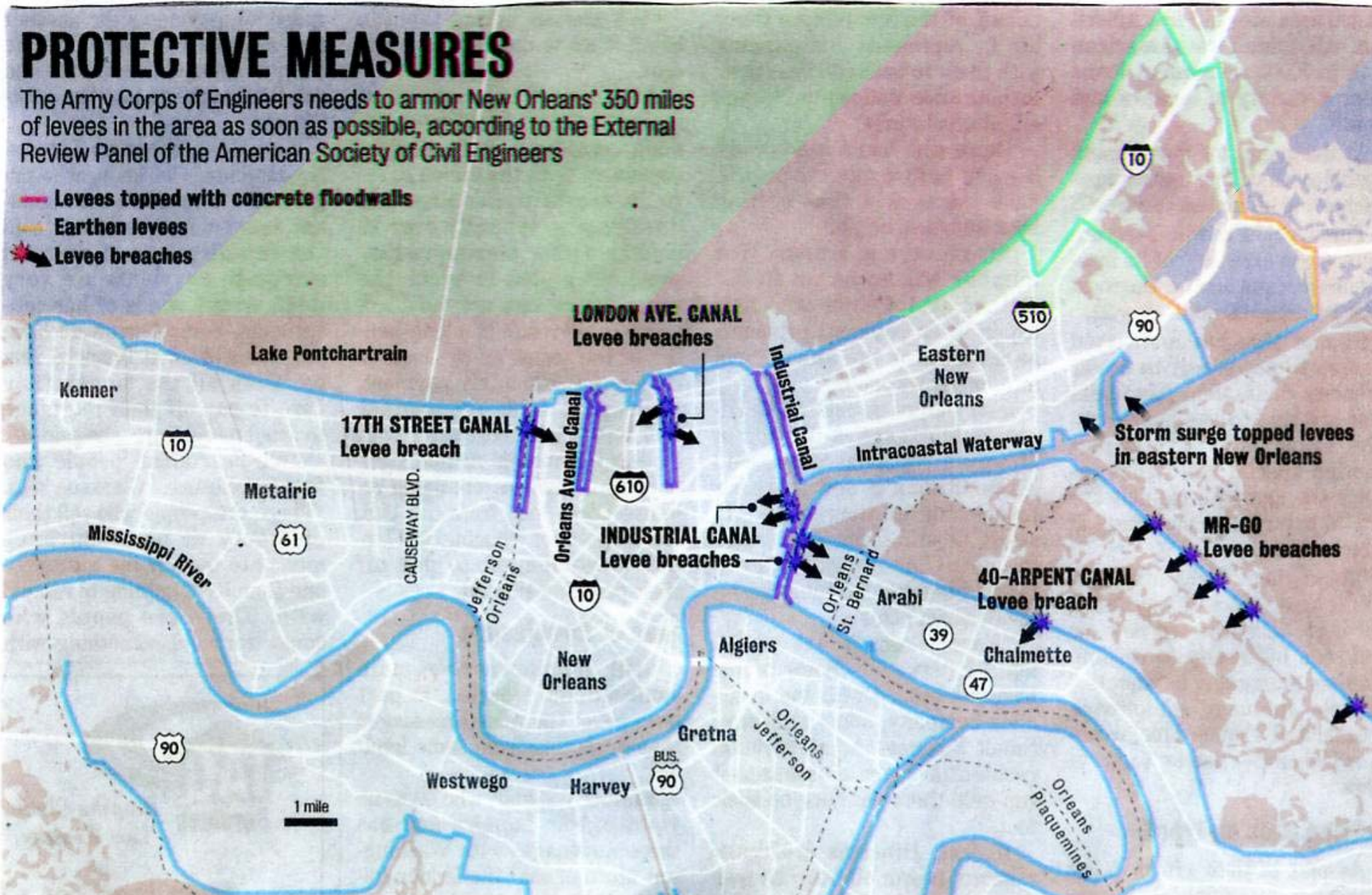


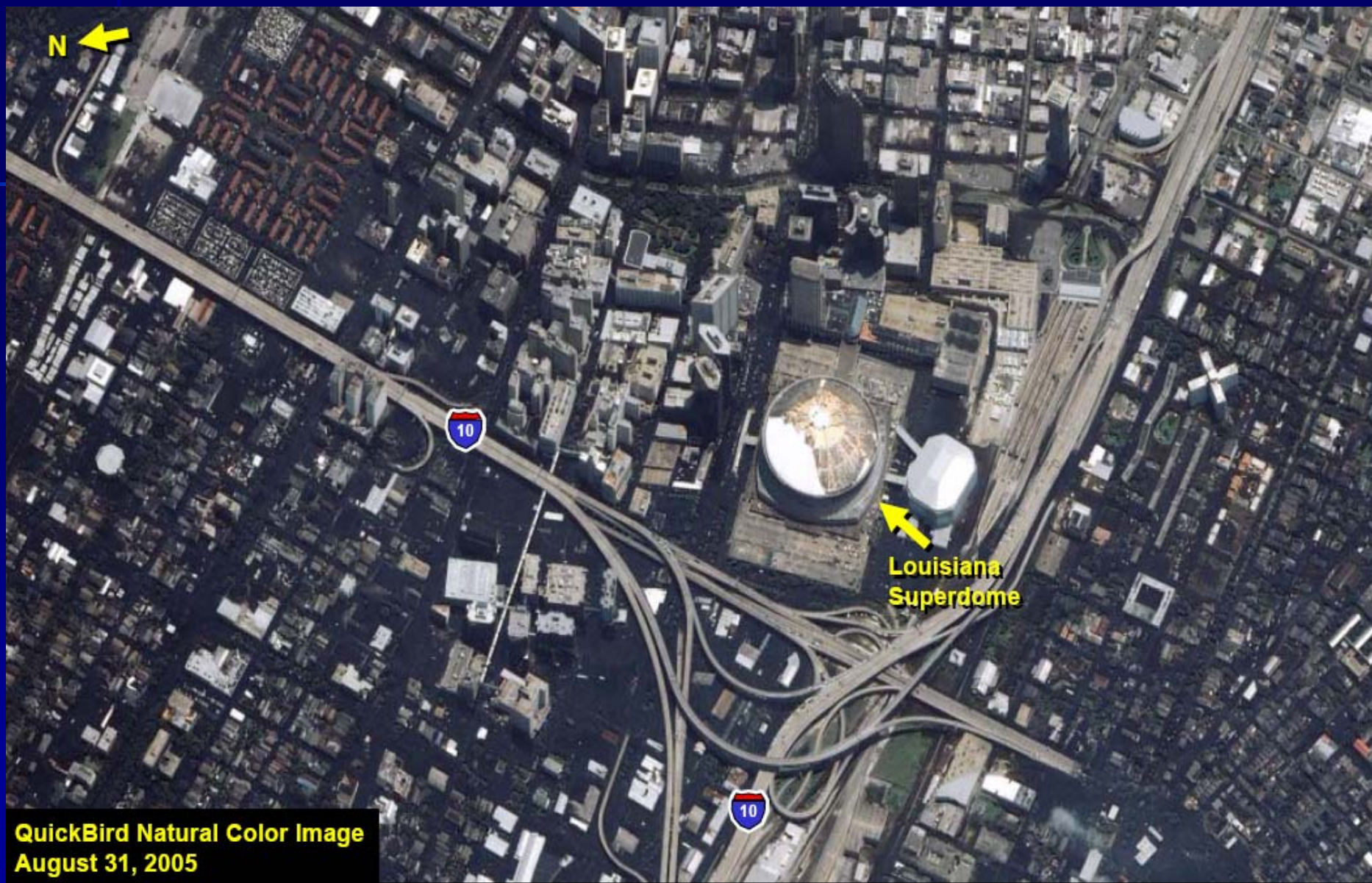
Man-Made Disaster

PROTECTIVE MEASURES

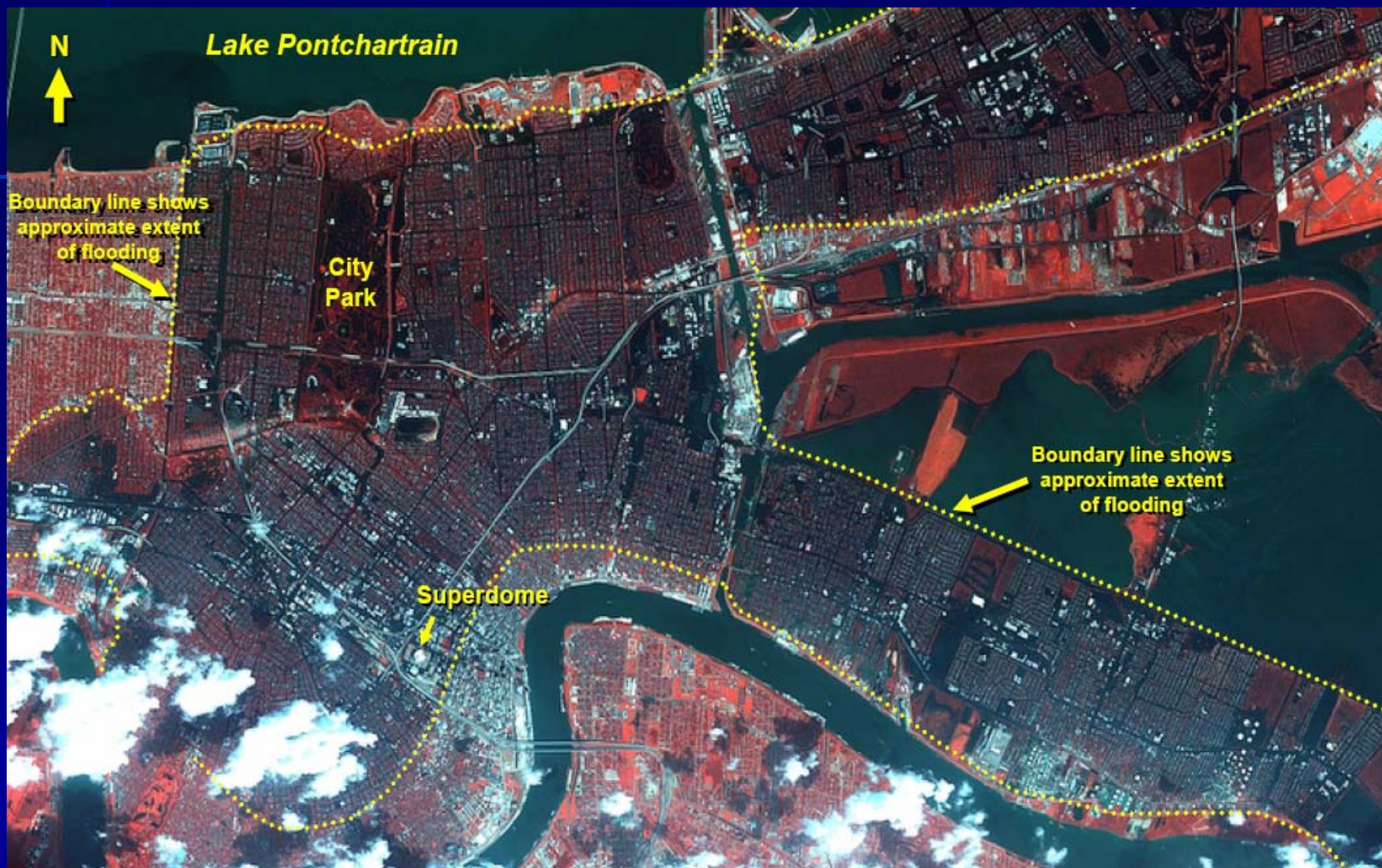
The Army Corps of Engineers needs to armor New Orleans' 350 miles of levees in the area as soon as possible, according to the External Review Panel of the American Society of Civil Engineers

- Levees topped with concrete floodwalls
- Earthen levees
- Levee breaches





**QuickBird Natural Color Image
August 31, 2005**



Shoes made of rubber bands and Keep Moving cigar boxes
Increases risk for injury, infection and disability



Disasters and Environmental Health

- Defending and advancing the human right to a healthy environment
- Advocating for human rights protection of internally displaced hurricane survivors

Unregulated Environmental Protection System Destroys Communities



What's left of the historic, African American community of Morrisonville, LA after Dow Chemical began industrial operations

Weak Environmental Protection System Violates Human Rights

The right to life



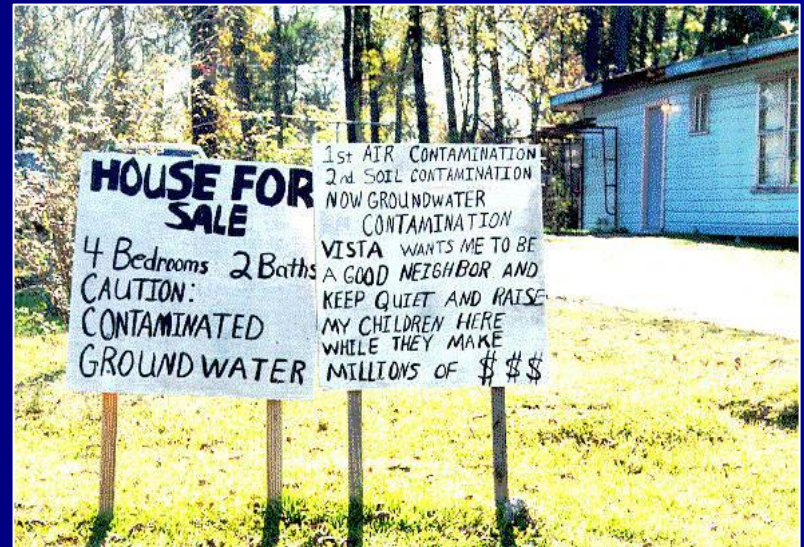
The right to health



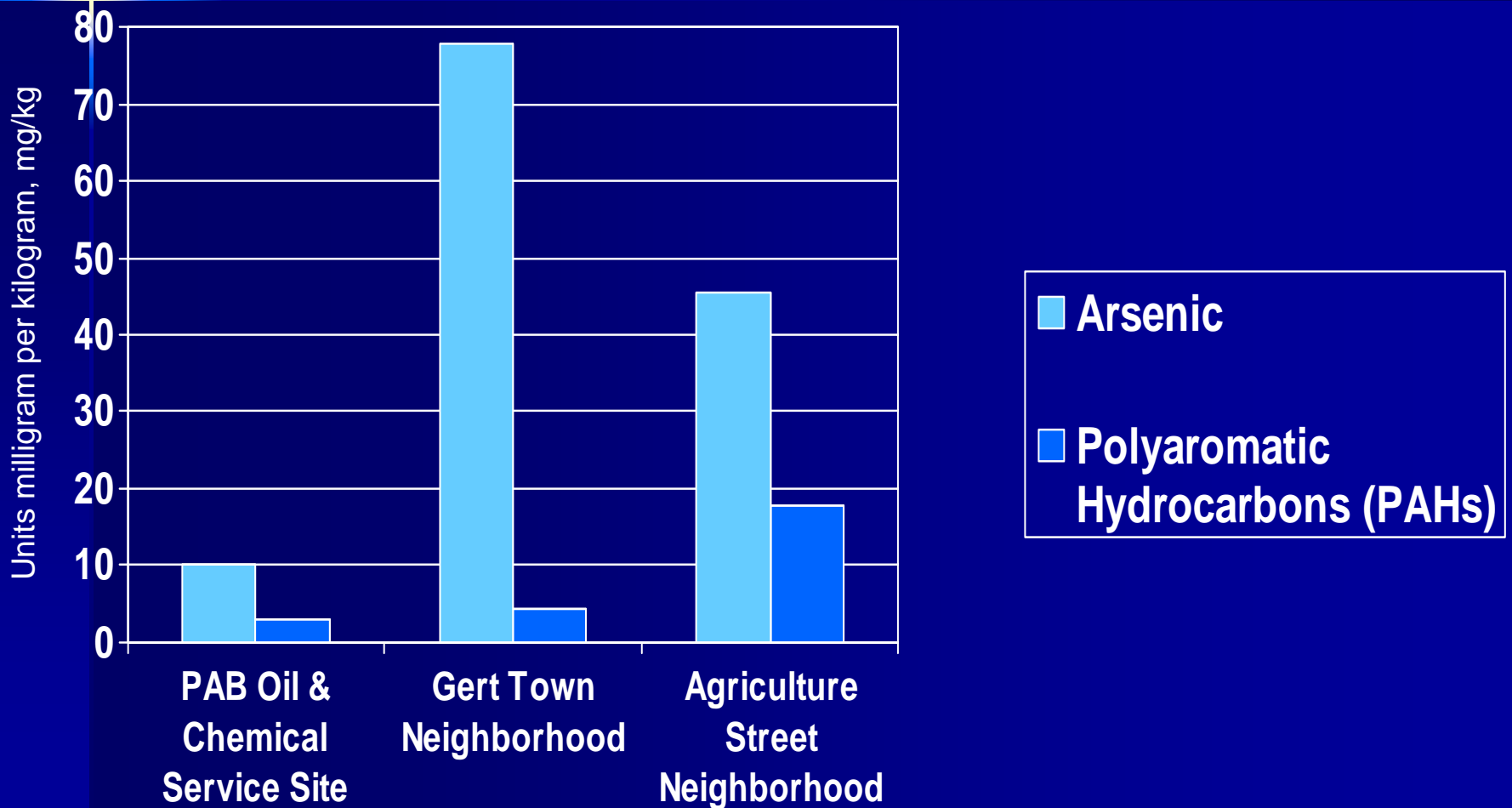
The right to racial equality



The right to privacy



Post-Hurricane Katrina: Contaminated Sediment



when the
levees
breached
toxic flood
waters
drowned
cars,
people and
animals .



Dr. Taylor's Home Library



Animated Map

[http://www.nola.com/katrina/graphics/flashflood.
swf](http://www.nola.com/katrina/graphics/flashflood.swf)

Dr. Taylor's Home Library



Post-Hurricane Katrina: Legislation to Deny Health Protections



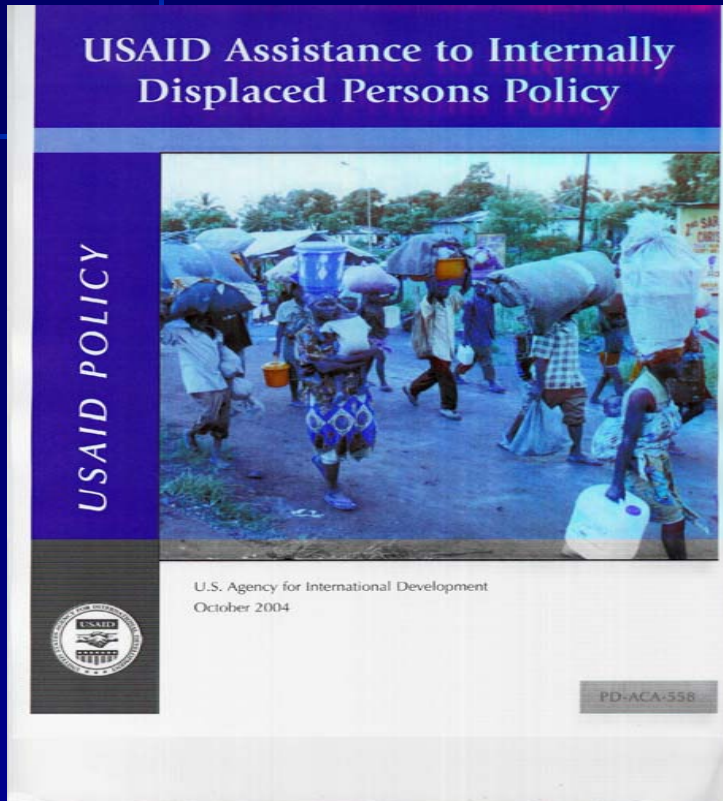
Toward an Anti-Racist, Just & Sustainable Rebuilding



“The right to return” galvanized coalition-building among local residents and groups with national and international partners.

See the video at www.peoplesvideo.tv

Disaster Recovery & Human Rights



- **1998 – United Nations *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement***
- **2004 – USAID/State Department Policy**

U.S. State Department human rights policy recognizes that internally displaced people are “among the world’s most vulnerable” because

- they have no special legal status/protection under international law, unlike refugees
- their government restricts humanitarian assistance & long-term development aid
- they are uprooted multiple times for years
- women & children are subjected to abuse and neglect
- they return to destroyed homes and towns, hostile local officials, and face obstacles to returning home
- prolonged displacement sets back progress in education, healthcare, infrastructure, & local governance

The church steeple still sits above the flood waters.



U.S. Human Rights Policy for Internally Displaced Persons

Humanitarian Assistance

- Provide housing, food, water, sanitation systems, and healthcare
- Access to education, training, microcredit, legal documents, trauma counseling, locating families, support to improve self-reliance

U.S. Human Rights Policy for Internally Displaced Persons

Return and Transition Assistance

- Provide transportation to return home
- Help to reclaim land and rebuild houses and businesses
- Support to establish accountable local governance and stronger civil society
- Safeguard the rights of female-headed households

U.S. Human Rights Policy for Internally Displaced Persons

Long-Term Development Assistance

- Construct infrastructure, health systems, and schools
- Develop modes of transportation and transportation routes
- Support access to vocational training and business loans

When the levees breached people were caught off guard and rowed to higher ground .



Families with no cars wading through flood waters
seeking safety and transportation :



We have the human right to return to healthy communities

- **"Environmental justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide."**

*First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit
Principle #10, Principles of Environmental Justice (1991)*
- **"The absence of regulation, inappropriate regulation or a lack of supervision in the application of extant norms may create serious problems with respect to the environment that can translate into violations of human rights"**

*Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
of the Organization of American States
Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Ecuador (1997)*
- **US State Department given one year to report on the implementation of the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in the Gulf Coast recovery. U.S. government instructed to increase efforts to ensure that the rights of African Americans and the poor to access housing, education, and healthcare are protected in the reconstruction effort.**

*United Nations' Human Rights Committee
Concluding Observations for U.S.A. (2006)*

WP -- Katrina environmental toll

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- [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

- **Katrina Takes Environmental Toll**

Water Could Be Unsafe for Years; Bush, Congress To Probe Relief

- Wednesday, September 7, 2005; A01

- NEW ORLEANS, Sept. 6 -- The dank and putrid floodwaters choking this once-gracious city are so poisoned with gasoline, industrial chemicals, feces and other contaminants that even casual contact is hazardous, and safe drinking water may not be available for the entire population for years to come, state and federal officials warned Tuesday.

- Mayor Ray Nagin authorized law enforcement officers and the military to force the evacuation of all residents who refuse to heed orders to leave. Nagin's emergency declaration, released late Tuesday, targets those still in the city unless they have been designated by government officials as helping with the relief effort.

Katrina env. health story - 2

- It came as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers gingerly pumped swill into Lake Pontchartrain, where rising water levels could increase pressure on levees that may have been damaged when Katrina hit but cannot be checked because they are under water on the city side.
- As hundreds of police officers, emergency workers and volunteers waded through flooded neighborhoods trying to coax remaining residents from their ruined homes, health officials offered the first tentative assessments of the environmental damage wrought by Hurricane Katrina and its resulting floods: They ranged from contaminated water to the destruction of coastline that acts as a

Katrina env. health story - 3

- The fallout from Katrina continued to buffet Washington; President Bush and members of Congress announced at least three separate probes into the faltering governmental response to the storm and its aftermath. Bush, reeling from bipartisan complaints about the slow federal reaction, promised to lead an investigation to "find out what went right and what went wrong" and informed congressional leaders of a request for as much as \$40 billion in additional relief funds.
- State officials released new tallies of Katrina's destruction, with up to 160,000 homes in Louisiana destroyed and nearly 190,000 public school

Story diagnostic: According to R. Logan

- Important summary of environmental health impact of storm, flooding, lethargy in clean up
- Implies serious public health risks
- Based on statements by senior public officials & knowledgeable sources
- What type of mood does the story create?
- What's missing in the story?
- What's a good follow up story?

***Environmental Justice and Health protections are
key to Community Recovery post-disaster.***



Resources & Websites for you to explore nola.com, sdpconference.info

- Eurekalert.org
- The Velveteen Rabbit, M. Williams
- <http://ire.org/sciencecenter.html>
- <http://www.reporter.org/desktop/>
- Association Health Care Journalists
- Medlineplus.gov
- [http://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov/index_content.h
tml](http://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov/index_content.html)
- <http://householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov/>

IRE health/environment databases

- National Practitioner Databank
 - Manufacturer and User Facility Device Experience Database
 - CDC AIDS Public Information Dataset
 - Mortality, Multiple Cause of Death
 - FDA Adverse Event Reporting System
 - FEC Campaign Contributions Database
 - Hazardous Materials
 - Nuclear Materials Events
 - The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Information System (CERCLIS)
 - Toxic Release Inventory

Words for you to explore:

- Health Disparities
- Epidemiology
- Environmental chemist
- Environmental toxicology
- Field biologist
- Clinical psychologist
- Health journalist
- Nurse practitioner
- Community researcher